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DE RUEHMS #0438/01 1670324
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
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FM AMEMBASSY MUSCAT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9696
INFO RUEHZM/GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MUSCAT 000438

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/ARP, G/TIP

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/14/2018

TAGS: PHUM PREL KCRM KWMN SMIG ELAB MU

SUBJECT: RESULTS OF SAFE HOUSE SURVEY PROVIDE SPECIFIC EXAMPLES OF ABUSE

REF: A. MUSCAT 425
¶B. MUSCAT 426

Classified By: Ambassador Gary A. Grappo for Reasons 1.4 b/d.

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SUMMARY
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¶1. (C) Summary: Using a survey designed by Post, the Philippine Embassy in Muscat recently interviewed 30 women seeking shelter in its safe house who had run away from their Omani sponsors in response to alleged mistreatment.

According to the survey results, which Post compiled and analyzed, many of the women faced physical, psychological and/or sexual abuse. Most claimed they were paid less than their contracted wage for work often in excess of seventeen hours per day. Less than half of the women said they had lodged a formal complaint of abuse with Omani authorities; of the complaints that were filed, none resulted in criminal investigations into possible trafficking. End summary.

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SURVEY BACKGROUND
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¶12. (C) In an effort to collect specific examples of trafficking in Oman, poloff developed a survey for use with third country national women seeking shelter in safe houses maintained by their respective embassies in Muscat. The Philippines, Sri Lanka and India are the only countries that currently operate safe houses, which in most cases act as a place of refuge for women who came to Oman to work as maids and subsequently ran away from their sponsors citing alleged abuse. Poloff approached all three embassies and asked if their staff would be willing to conduct the survey and share its results. The Philippine Embassy agreed and later supplied poloff with the completed surveys of 30 women who sought shelter in its safe house during the month of April ¶2008. Poloff was not present when the survey was conducted and therefore cannot vouch for the Philippine Embassy's interview methodology. However, the results corroborate anecdotal evidence of trafficking that Post has collected from other sources.

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Symptoms of Abuse
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¶13. (C) The survey asked women to identify all the types of abuse that they had faced in their sponsor's household. 43% of the 30 women who participated said that they had been hit by a member of the sponsor's family; 60% claimed that they had been threatened with physical or some other form of punishment. One-third asserted that they had been forced to work extra hours for the sponsor's extended family, and 40% claimed that their sponsors had provided them with insufficient food. 25% of respondents alleged that their

sponsor or a member of his family had touched them sexually; two claimed that they were the victims of attempted rape, and one stated that she was raped. Each of the women said that her sponsor had withheld her passport and none of the women had travel documents with them when they arrived at the safe house.

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Wages
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¶4. (C) The survey also asked women about their contracts and working conditions. The average contracted wage among the 30 respondents was 69 Omani Riyal (OR) (USD 180) per month. (Note: On March 1, 2007, the Philippine government instituted a minimum wage requirement of USD 400 (150 OR) for Filipina nationals working as maids overseas, which it attempts to enforce by having its embassies review and approve contracts before allowing its nationals to depart the Philippines for overseas employment. The highest contracted wage among all 30 women was 120 OR (USD 311) and all but ten of the women said that they arrived in Oman after their government's policy went into effect. End note.) Many of the women claimed that their sponsors did not abide by the contract, however, and paid them less than the agreed wage. The women's reported actual monthly wage averaged 64 OR (USD 166). In return for their salaries, the women alleged that they worked an average of 17.5 hours per day for their sponsor and his extended family. Two-thirds of the women reported that their sponsors had withheld all or part of their wages for an average of two months. One woman claimed that her sponsor withheld her salary for four months, half of

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the total amount of time that she worked for him before running away.

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Omani Government Action
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¶5. (C) Only 43% of the women participating in the survey said that they had lodged a formal complaint with Oman's Ministry of Manpower (MOM) or the Royal Oman Police (ROP). Most of those who had contacted authorities reported that their case was settled out of court and that they were either being assigned a new sponsor or preparing for repatriation to the Philippines. The other 57% of survey respondents said that their cases were "under negotiation" with their sponsor. (Note: Post assumes that the Philippine Embassy, perhaps with the facilitation of the MOM, is negotiating on behalf of these women with their sponsors per its established practice. End note.) The Philippine Labor Attaché told poloff that he would look into the status of these women's cases.

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Comment and Next Steps
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¶6. (C) The data from this survey provide a snapshot of the kind of abuse that domestic employees may face in Oman and thirty specific cases, some of which could rise to the level of trafficking, that appear to warrant further investigation by Omani authorities (refs A & B). The Philippine labor attaché told poloff that he was willing to conduct the survey with other groups of women in the embassy's safe house over the next six months and share the results with the Embassy for analysis. Post will continue reaching out to the other two embassies that operate safe houses to encourage their involvement - the Sri Lankans currently are in possession of the survey but have not provided Post with any results to date. Data from a larger sample of women may help draw a more complete picture about the possible scope of abuse and trafficking among maids. End comment.

GRAPPO